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ABSTRACT

In compliance with Section 724 of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of July 22, 1987 (Public Law 100-77), this GAO report to Congressional Committees provides estimates of the number of homeless children and youth in all states. Estimates are reported, along with additional information on subgroups for whom it was not possible to obtain unduplicated counts. Findings indicate that on a given night, about 68,000 children and youth of 16 and younger may be members of families that are literally homeless. Of these children and youth, about 25,500 are likely to be in urban shelters and hotels; about 21,800 in suburban and rural areas; about 4,000 in churches; about 9,000 in abandoned buildings, cars, or public places; and about 7,700 in various other settings. In addition to children and youth who are literally homeless, nearly 186,000 may be precariously housed in shared housing. These estimates do not include homeless runaway children and youth. Appendices include a review of objective, scope, and methodology; estimates of the number of homeless children and youth; characteristics of children and youth in urban shelters; homeless children and youth not included in the estimates; the number of families served annually; methods of comparison with other estimates; experts consulted; and major contributors to the report. (RH)

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June 1989

United States General Accounting Office

Report to Congressional Committees

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CHILDREN AND YOUTHS

About 68,000 Homeless and 186,000 in Shared Housing at Any Given Time

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GAO/PEMD-89-14

GAO

United States
General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Program Evaluation and
Methodology Division

B-234534

June 15, 1989

The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy
Chairman, Committee on Labor and Human Resources
United States Senate

The Honorable Augustus F. Hawkins
Chairman, Committee on Education and Labor
House of Representatives

Section 724 of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, July 22, 1987 (Public Law 100-77), requires us to submit to the Congress an estimate of the number of homeless children and youths in all the states. As requested, we report here our estimates, along with additional information on subgroups for whom it was not possible to obtain unduplicated counts.

Estimates of the Number of Homeless Children and Youths

On a given night, about 68,000 children and youths of age 16 and younger may be members of families that are literally homeless. Of these children and youths, about 25,500 are likely to be in urban shelters and hotels; about 21,800 are likely to be in suburban and rural areas; about 4,000 are housed by churches; about 9,000 may be sleeping in abandoned buildings, cars, or public places; and about 7,700 may be in various other settings. In addition to those who are literally homeless, nearly 186,000 children and youths may be precariously housed, spending the night in doubled-up ("shared housing") circumstances. (See table 1.) These estimates do not include homeless runaway children and youths.

Table 1: Estimated Number of U.S. Homeless Children and Youths at Any Given Time[a]

Category	Best estimate	Range		Source	Confidence
		Low	High		
Literally homeless					
Urban					
Shelters and hotels	25,522	18,265	32,779	Surveys	High
Churches	4,094	2,340	6,570	Opinion	Low
Public places	9,016	4,512	24,072	Opinion	Low
Other	7,651	5,168	10,446	Opinion	Low
Suburban	14,427	7,213	21,641	Population rates	Moderate
Rural	7,357	3,678	11,035	Population rates	Moderate
Total	**68,067**	**41,176**	**106,543**	**Varies**	**Moderate**
Precariously housed					
Doubled-up	**185,512**	**39,362**	**296,452**	**Opinion**	**Low**

[a]The low and high estimates represent a plausible range of values based on various assumptions. The "source" column refers to the three primary sources of information upon which estimates are based: our surveys of shelter providers and agencies providing vouchers (conducted on October 24, 1988), the application of homeless rates to a population base, and expert opinion. The confidence rating reflects our assessment of the level of certainty that can be expected of the estimates, given the reliability of the data source and the range of estimates provided.

Comparisons With Other Estimates

Two other recently issued national studies of the literally homeless population—one conducted by the Urban Institute and the other by the Institute of Medicine—yield estimates that, when adjusted for differences in definitions, are consistent with our aggregate estimate of about 68,000 literally homeless children and youths (see appendix VI). Given the similarity of these estimates, we are moderately confident that our estimate of the number of literally homeless persons is accurate. Comprehensive estimates were not available from mandated state reports and the cities we visited. We were unable to locate any other national estimates or counts of the number of children and youths who might be doubled up with families or friends.

Variability in Our Estimates

Estimates or counts of the number of children and youths who are members of homeless families are not, and cannot be, as precise as we would like (see appendix II). As shown in table 1, there is considerable variability in our estimates. Taking into account uncertainties in counting these populations, our analyses show that in the worst case, as many as 106,543 children and youths may be among the literally homeless and an additional 296,452 may be doubled up on a given night. In the best case, there may be as few as 41,176 literally homeless and 39,362 doubled up.

Characteristics of Children and Youths in Urban Shelters

Information on the characteristics of homeless children was obtained from our survey of urban family shelters (see appendix III).[1] Among the children whose ages were reported, 52 percent were 5 or younger, 36 percent were 6 through 12, and 12 percent were 13 through 16. Only about half of the sample (48 percent) were school-age children (ages 6 through 16). Of the school-age children, where data were available, 85 percent were reported to attend school regularly and an additional 5 percent were planning to attend but had not yet enrolled.[2] Although high attendance rates have been reported in other studies, the Child Welfare League of America and Travelers Aid International reported that 43 percent of school-age homeless children seen by Travelers Aid agencies were not currently attending school. The differences in estimates may reflect differences in the population studied. Children in shelters are likely to be less transient than those served by Travelers Aid agencies.[3]

Children and Youths Not Included in Our Estimates

Other homeless children and youths may not be included in the counts listed above (see appendix IV). Some older children and youths are served by or connected with networks reaching runaway youths. Our analysis of existing data suggests that there may be as many as 208,000 unaccompanied homeless youths such as these each year. Advocates for homeless persons estimate that this number is even higher.

Our count was for a single point in time, October 24, 1988. While we were unable to obtain unduplicated annual counts, our best estimate is that shelter operators and private voucher providers in urban counties serve families that include about 310,000 children and youths (based on duplicated counts) each year (see appendix V). Our figures also exclude annual counts (either duplicated or unduplicated) of children who are in families that are placed in hotels and motels by government agencies. These children and youths represent 42 percent of the 1-night count estimate.

[1]In discussions with congressional offices following the enactment of the McKinney Act, we agreed to obtain information on the characteristics of children in shelters and their school attendance.

[2]Representing 93.5 percent of the estimated number of school-age children in the shelter sample. Because parents might be unwilling to report that their children are not attending school, we may have overestimated attendance.

[3]We were unable to obtain estimates of school attendance for children and youths in nonshelter settings.

Scope and Methodology

Estimates of the number of homeless children and youths in this country vary, depending on how broadly or narrowly homelessness is defined. There is no consensus among experts as to what constitutes an appropriate definition. In developing our estimates, we distinguished between children and youths of 16 and younger who are literally homeless (in shelters, for example) and those who are precariously housed. Our estimate of the number of literally homeless persons included children and youths in urban shelters and hotels and motels, churches, other public places, miscellaneous other settings, and suburban and rural areas. Assuming that the McKinney Act could be broadly interpreted to include those who are precariously housed, we also estimated the number of children and youths who are doubled up with friends or relatives.

In deriving our estimates, we used a methodology of three steps. First, we obtained an estimate of the unduplicated count of the homeless children and youths by conducting a survey in 40 large urban counties. This method yielded a nationally representative estimate of the number of children in shelters and hotels or motels in urban counties on October 24, 1988.

Second, we computed estimates of the number of children and youths in other settings by adjusting the county estimates. These adjustments were derived from expert opinions, reflecting their estimates of the proportions of homeless children and youths in other settings. To estimate the number of homeless children and youths in rural and suburban settings, we used the average of our high and low estimates as the basis for our best-estimate adjustment. (See page 15.) To estimate the number of children and youths in rural and suburban areas, we applied this adjustment to the known population size for these areas.

Third, to check on the likely accuracy of our estimates, we compared our results, where possible, with the results of other published and unpublished studies, and we conducted case studies in three cities. We also rated the confidence that we placed in each estimate and provided a range of estimates (low to high) that took into account the uncertainty associated with estimating this highly mobile population.

Agency Comments

We obtained informal comments on a draft of this report from the Department of Education. Agency officials noted that our estimates differed considerably from the estimates they had submitted to the Congress based on mandated reports provided by state coordinators for the homeless. They had estimated many more literally homeless children

and youths than we did and many fewer living in doubled-up circumstances. In accounting for these differences, the department noted that the majority of the states reported annual estimates of the number of children and youths we have labeled as literally homeless; our estimate was for a single day. Further, about one third of the states did not provide estimates of the number of precariously housed children and youths, and some of those that did indicated that they were not confident in the numbers they provided.

As we arranged with your offices, we will send copies of this report to the secretary of Education and to the state and local officials who assisted us. We will also make copies available to others upon request. Please call me on (202) 275-1854 or Lois-ellin Datta on (202) 275-1370 if you need further information. Major contributors to this report are listed in appendix VIII.

Eleanor Chelimsky
Assistant Comptroller General

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Abbreviations

AFDC	Aid to Families with Dependent Children
HHS	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
HUD	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

Objective

Under sections 721 and 722 of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, state education agencies are required to ensure that homeless children and youths have access to free and appropriate education. The act also requires each state to establish a coordinator of education of homeless children and youths to gather data on the number and location of homeless children and youths.[1] Section 724(a) of the act requires us to submit to the Congress an estimate of the number of homeless children and youths in all the states.

Scope and Methodology

Estimates of the size of the homeless population depend, in part, on the definition of homelessness. In developing our estimates, we used several definitions. To estimate the number of literally homeless persons, we considered five settings representing the variety of places where homeless children and youths might be found. These included (1) urban shelters, hotels, and motels, (2) churches, (3) public places and miscellaneous other settings, (4) suburban areas, and (5) rural areas. We refer to the aggregated estimated numbers of children in these settings as representing the possible number of literally homeless persons. The McKinney Act definition could also be interpreted to include children and youths who are precariously housed.[2] To represent this definition, we have estimated the number of children in families who are doubled up with friends or relatives.

We used several different methods to derive estimates, and they differ in the amount of confidence that can be placed in the resulting numbers. We have the most confidence in the estimate based on an unduplicated count of homeless children in urban counties who were, at one point in time, in shelters or placed in hotels or motels by private nonprofit agencies and local government agencies. This number puts a lower boundary on the number of homeless children and youths in urban counties.

[1]Section 724(b) of the act requires the secretary of Education to compile and submit to the Congress a report containing the information received from the states. The department issued its report on February 15, 1989.

[2]The McKinney Act states that the term "homeless" or "homeless individual" includes an individual who (1) lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and (2) has a primary nighttime residence that is (a) a supervised, publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill), (b) an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized, and (c) a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings (emphasis added). This definition could be interpreted to include individuals who double up, to the extent that the space is not fixed and regular and can result in extremely overcrowded and unsafe conditions. The experts (listed in appendix VII) and social service agencies working with homeless persons have characterized doubling up as a short-term solution to a family's homelessness.

Estimates of the number of children in settings other than urban shelters and hotels or motels are derived from projections of the lower-bound estimate, most of which are based on the opinions of service providers. We place the least confidence in the opinion-based estimates.

We have also developed opinion-based estimates of the number of children whose families are doubled up with friends or relatives. We have included an estimate of the size of this population because some experts believe that estimates that do not include this population are excluding a significant portion of the population of homeless families and because the McKinney Act definition of homelessness could be interpreted to include this group. Further, we have included families who are doubled up, for comparability with estimates provided by the state coordinators for the education of homeless children and youths.

Our lower-bound estimate was developed from two sources of information: a 40-county telephone survey of shelter providers and records of local government agencies on hotel use in the counties of 27 urban cities.[3] We selected the 40 counties we surveyed through a random sample of all urban counties, and the survey results can be generalized to similar areas nationwide. We developed estimates for nonurban areas by projecting from the lower-bound estimate based on the rates of homelessness found in urban areas, national data on suburban and rural areas, and expert opinion. Our basic method was to obtain an empirically based estimate of an unduplicated count from the nationally representative sample of urban shelter providers and then to compute estimates of children in other settings by applying to the lower-bound estimates ratios (multipliers) derived from expert judgments that reflect the estimated proportion of children located in other settings.

Our study focused on children of age 16 and younger. The primary survey was conducted twice: as a pilot study in May 1988 and with the full count in October 1988. We have reported here the results for October. Appendix II provides details on the basis for the estimates. This review was conducted according to generally accepted government auditing standards.

[3]The term "shelter provider" is used in this report to refer to both "shelter operator," who operates emergency shelters or transitional living facilities, and "voucher provider," or a private, nonprofit agency that does not operate shelters but issues vouchers or in some other way provides compensation for homeless persons to stay in shelters, hotels, or motels. An "urban city" is a city with a population of 250,000 or more. An "urban county" is a county that contains one or a portion of these cities.

Estimates of the Number of Homeless Children and Youths at Any Given Time

The Number of Children and Youths in Urban Shelters, Hotels, and Motels

Our lower-bound estimate of the number of homeless children and youths was based on a survey of shelter providers (both shelter operators and voucher providers) and information from government agencies that place families in hotels or motels. The focus of this estimate was the set of urban counties nationwide.

Identifying Shelter Providers

To select the sample of urban counties, we began by identifying all U.S. cities with populations of 250,000 or larger (N = 58), according to the 1987 Statistical Abstract of the United States. Because this phase of the study was to focus on urban counties and two of the cities on the list were in the same county, we excluded one of these cities from the sampling frame, resulting in a list of 57 cities. The 57 cities, or portions of them, were in 83 counties with a total population of 72,278,000.

We included in our survey the counties of three of these cities (Los Angeles, Boston, and Norfolk) in order to draw on previous experience we had in studying the homeless in these areas.[1] We drew a sample of 24 additional cities from the 54 remaining cities, and we included the 37 counties of these 24 cities in the shelter provider survey.[2] The 27 cities selected and the 40 counties included in the surveys are shown in table II.1.

Table II.1: Cities and Counties Included in the Study Sample

City	County	State
Albuquerque	Bernalillo	New Mexico
Austin	Travis, Williamson	Texas
Baltimore	[a]	Maryland
Boston	Suffolk	Massachusetts
Buffalo	Erie	New York
Chicago	Cook, Dupage	Illinois
Cleveland	Cuyahoga	Ohio
Dallas	Dallas, Collin, Denton, Kaufman, Rockwall	Texas
Denver	Denver	Colorado
Detroit	Wayne	Michigan

[1]See our report Homeless Mentally Ill: Problems and Options in Estimating Numbers and Trends, GAO/PEMD-88-24 (Washington, D.C.: August 1988).

[2]The cities were sampled proportionate to the total population of the county or counties in which a city was located. The counties in which a city was located were identified from the 1983 county and city data book.

City	County	State
Fort Worth	Tarrant	Texas
Honolulu	Honolulu	Hawaii
Houston	Fort Bend, Harris, Montgomery	Texas
Jacksonville	Duval	Florida
Los Angeles	Los Angeles	California
Louisville	Jefferson	Kentucky
Milwaukee	Milwaukee, Washington	Wisconsin
New Orleans	Orleans Parish	Louisiana
New York	New York, Bronx, Kings, Queens, Richmond	New York
Newark	Essex	New Jersey
Norfolk	[a]	Virginia
Oakland	Alameda	California
Philadelphia	Philadelphia	Pennsylvania
Pittsburgh	Allegheny	Pennsylvania
San Antonio	Bexar	Texas
Seattle	King	Washington
Toledo	Lucas	Ohio

[a]The cities of Baltimore and Norfolk are not part of a county.

The Shelter Provider Survey

We assembled an inventory of 623 shelter providers who were believed to be serving homeless families in our sample of 40 urban counties. This inventory included both operators of emergency shelters and transitional living facilities and private, nonprofit agencies that provided vouchers for the use of hotels and motels. We compiled an initial list of providers of shelter to homeless families in each county by contacting local government agencies, advocates for the homeless, and local board representatives from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. We sent the lists developed for each county from these sources for a final review to several individuals in each county believed to be knowledgeable sources of information on homeless families. Any remaining shelter providers on the lists that did not serve families were screened in the survey process.

Sampling Shelters

From among the shelter providers in each county, we selected a stratified random sample for a telephone interview. Within each county, there were three strata: (1) a sample of shelter operators who were randomly selected for a pilot survey in May 1988, (2) additional shelter operators who were not included in the May survey, and (3) voucher providers.

All the shelter operators in stratum 1 were included in the October survey, and random samples were drawn from strata 2 and 3. Across the 40 counties, 430 of the 623 shelter providers were included in the sample. This sample was designed to yield a confidence interval of plus or minus 10 percent around an estimate of the total number of children served by shelter providers in all urban counties.

The Shelter Survey

About 2 weeks in advance of the count night, we sent each shelter provider a brief statement of the purpose of our study, a copy of the survey instrument, and a letter confirming the count night arrangements. When we made our postcount-night calls, we attempted to contact the director of each agency or shelter. Our questions included the number of families and children served on the night of October 24, 1988, the ages of the children sheltered, the number of school-age children who regularly attended school, the number of families served yearly, and estimates of the percentage of homeless families in the county that would be found in each of several settings.

The estimated number of children in shelters and in hotels or motels with vouchers through private agencies was based on data provided by 310 shelter providers, of whom 244 were shelter operators and 91 were voucher providers (25 were both shelter operators and voucher providers).[3]

Hotel and Motel Use Records

Information was collected on the sample of 40 urban counties from the 27 local government agencies that used hotels or motels to shelter homeless families.[4] Local government contacts were asked to furnish the number of families or children placed by the agencies in hotels or motels on the night of October 24, 1988. When only the number of families was available, we used existing reports or the local government's estimate of the number of children in each family, if one was available, to estimate the number of children.

[3]We successfully contacted and, when appropriate, gathered information from over 91 percent (392) of the 430 shelter providers selected. Of the successful postcount-night contacts, 310 interviews were completed with providers of shelter to children of homeless families, and 82 interviews were terminated with shelter providers who did not serve families. An additional 28 providers were unavailable or refused to respond to the interview, and the phone numbers of 10 had been disconnected.

[4]Issues associated with the use and cost of welfare hotels and motels in selected cities were examined in our recent report titled Welfare Hotels: Uses, Costs, and Alternatives, GAO/HRD-89-26BR (Washington, D.C.: January 31, 1989).

Projecting the Results to All Urban Counties

Our projection of the number of homeless children in shelters and hotels or motels in all 83 urban counties is a weighted sum of the number of children counted by the shelter providers contacted in the survey and the number of children placed by local government agencies.[5]

Range of Estimates

In addition to the projected number of homeless children in urban shelters and hotels, we derived low and high estimates for the projection, based on an estimate of the total sampling error reflecting variations in (1) the number of children counted among shelter providers within each stratum in each county, (2) the average number counted among strata within each county, (3) the average number counted among counties, and (4) the numbers placed in hotels or motels by local governments. The low and high estimates represent the 95-percent confidence interval based on the estimated sampling error.

Results

Among the 310 shelter providers, 7,213 children stayed in shelters and 860 were using vouchers on October 24.[6] And, according to the 27 government agencies we contacted, 9,516 additional children were placed in hotels or motels. Projected nationally to all 83 urban counties, our best estimate is that 25,522 children and youths reside in urban shelters or hotels or motels at any one point in time. Allowing for uncertainty from sampling error, this number could be as low as 18,265 or as high as 32,779.

Underuse of Shelters in October

Because seasonal variation can influence the use of shelters, we asked shelter operators and voucher providers in the October survey to indicate the number of families they sheltered during peak months. If all the shelter operators we contacted served the reported number of families sheltered each night during peak periods, 3,662 families (with an estimated 7,324 children) would be sheltered, a 23-percent increase over the

[5]The number of children counted by shelter providers was weighted by (1) the inverse of the appropriate within-county stratum sampling fraction and (2) a weight reflecting the inverse of the probability with which the county was chosen to be among those included in the survey. The hotel and motel use data for each county were weighted to reflect only the county's selection probability.

[6]Includes 186 children who were of families staying in shelters but who were reported to be spending the night elsewhere.

number served by the same shelter operators on October 24, 1988.[7] The voucher providers we contacted would have been able to provide assistance to 918 families (with an estimated 1,836 children) during peak periods—that is, a 221-percent increase over the 286 families actually served by the same voucher providers on October 24.

Overall, both types of shelter provider said they were able to provide services to 40 percent more families during peak periods than were served on the night of October 24, 1988. If all shelter providers operated at peak capacity, we project that 20,702 homeless children and youths could be served on any 1 night in urban counties nationwide.

It is not possible to assess the extent to which underuse of shelters in October influences the estimated total number of homeless children across all settings. Seasonal influences on the number of homeless persons in shelters could reflect only changes in the distribution of the homeless population among settings rather than changes in the size of the total population. For example, winter months may see an increase in the number of families in shelters and a decrease in the number in public places, while the total number of homeless persons may remain unchanged.

[7]Occupancy rates were also computed for shelters that were able to state their capacity in terms of number of families. Some shelters state capacity in terms of number of beds, only some of which are used for homeless families. When capacity is defined in terms of beds, it is not possible to compare capacity to the number of sheltered, especially when several children can use a single bed or can sleep on the floor or on cots. Shelters that stated their capacity in terms of families represented 40 percent of the shelters contacted. On October 24, 1988, shelters that were able to provide occupancy rates were operating at 83-percent capacity. Forty percent were filled to capacity. Based on these rates, if all shelters were filled to capacity, the estimates would increase by 20 percent.

The Number of Children in Nonurban Areas

Little is known about the prevalence of homelessness outside urban areas. Prior studies of the homeless population in suburban areas have assumed one third the rate found in central cities.[8] To project our lower-bound estimate of the rate of homelessness in suburban and rural areas, we used one third the median rate of homelessness found among the 27-city sample.[9] For our high estimate, we assumed that the median rate in the cities would apply to suburban and rural areas.

Applying the one-third rate to the total U.S. suburban and rural populations results in estimates of 7,213 additional children in suburban and 3,678 in rural areas. Assuming an equal rate of homelessness across urban, suburban, and rural settings (our higher-bound figure) results in estimates of an additional 21,641 in suburban and 11,035 in rural areas. Our best estimate is based on an average of the high and low estimates for suburban and rural areas. For suburban areas, our best estimate reveals 14,427 homeless children and youths. In rural areas, we estimate that there are 7,357 children and youths.

The Number of Children in Additional Settings and Doubled Up

Case studies conducted in Los Angeles, Boston, and Norfolk and reviews of our shelter provider survey plans by experts in homelessness suggested that estimates based only on shelter, hotel, and motel use would exclude significant segments of the total population of homeless families. In Los Angeles, for example, we were told that shelters maintained a 95-percent occupancy rate and that a survey of shelters would provide an estimate of the shelter resources available for homeless families rather than an estimate of the true population size.

According to experts on homeless persons, families can be found in three major settings in addition to shelters, hotels, and motels: churches

[8]This method was used by the National Alliance to End Homelessness and is based upon the findings of a study of Washington, D.C. (Frederic Robinson, "Homeless People in the Nation's Capital," University of the District of Columbia, Center for Applied Research and Urban Policy, Washington, D.C., 1985). This study showed that rates of homelessness among wards within D.C. that were devoted to residential use were about one third the rate of homelessness within the District of Columbia as a whole. A second study (Eric Goplerud, "Homelessness in Fairfax, a Suburb of Washington, D.C.," George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, 1987) reported that homelessness rates were about 9 per 10,000 in a suburban county near Washington, D.C. This rate was about one fourth the rate in Washington, D.C. (41 per 10,000). In a study of two urban counties in California (Alameda and Orange) and a rural county (Yolo), the Rand Corporation found rates per 10,000 of roughly 7, 4, and 6 ("Review of California's Program for the Homeless Mentally Disabled," Rand Corp., Santa Monica, California, 1988).

[9]Rates of homelessness for each city were based on the total population of all counties in which the city was located and the best lower-bound estimates of the number of homeless children in those same counties derived from the shelter provider survey and the hotel and motel use data.

(referring to the "informal" use of churches to house the homeless; missions that are operated as shelters would have been included in the shelter survey), public places (abandoned buildings, the streets, parks, and cars), and doubled up with friends or relatives.[10] The experts indicated, however, that no documented information is currently available upon which to base a national estimate of the number of children and youths in these settings.

Opinion-Based Estimates

To estimate the number of families residing outside shelters, hotels, and motels, we interviewed shelter providers, advocates, and knowledgeable government officials in the sample of 40 counties. Of the 464 individuals we contacted, 311 provided their countywide estimates of the relative number of homeless families residing in at least one of the additional settings. From their responses, we computed ratios that, when applied to the estimated number of families in shelters, provided estimates of the number of families in other settings.[11] The median ratios for each county are shown, by setting, in tables II.2-II.5.[12]

Table II.2: Church-to-Shelter Ratios Used to Estimate Numbers of Children in Other Settings

County and state	First quartile	Median	Third quartile	Number of respondents
Alameda, California	0.16	0.39	0.50	11
Los Angeles, California	0.15	0.30	0.45	9
Denver, Colorado	0.04	0.07	0.18	6
Duval, Florida	0.17	0.33	0.33	7
Honolulu, Hawaii	0.10	0.49	1.65	4
Cook, Illinois	0.20	0.23	0.35	10

[10]From the results of a survey of 500 residences, the Los Angeles Times also estimated that in 1987 there were 42,288 families with an average of five family members living in garages in Los Angeles County. The number of children was not reported. Assuming an average of 1.5 adults and 3.5 children in each family would produce an estimate of about 148,500 children in garages in Los Angeles County.

[11]Most of the persons we interviewed used percentages to provide a breakdown of the total county population of homeless families into various settings including shelters, hotels and motels, churches, public places, and doubled-up situations. These percentages were then converted into ratios. In some cases, the persons we interviewed provided the ratios themselves. In other cases, they provided estimates of the number of families in these settings. If possible, these too were converted into ratios and applied to our estimate of the shelter population. In two Texas counties (Rockwall County and Kaufman County), we found no shelters and therefore no shelter estimates to which the ratios could be applied. As a result, no estimates were generated for other settings in these two counties.

[12]These medians are based on nonzero values. In a number of cases, it appeared that "0" was used as a response when a respondent was not familiar with a particular setting. We assumed that at least some children can be found in every setting.

County and state	First quartile	Median	Third quartile	Number of respondents
Du Page, Illinois	0.35	1.40	2.38	4
Jefferson, Kentucky	0.02	0.02	0.02	1
Orleans Parish, Louisiana	0.17	0.50	0.80	5
Baltimore City, Maryland[a]	0.06	0.21	0.57	10
Suffolk, Massachusetts	0.05	0.07	0.10	4
Wayne, Michigan	0.10	0.25	0.40	3
Essex, New Jersey	0.08	0.20	1.00	7
Bernalillo, New Mexico	0	0	0	0
Bronx, New York	0.06	0.25	0.33	7
Erie, New York	0.27	0.28	0.30	2
Kings, New York	0.10	0.15	0.26	5
New York, New York	0.12	0.25	0.25	5
Queens, New York	0.04	0.10	0.22	4
Richmond, New York	0.26	0.38	0.50	2
Cuyahoga, Ohio	0.08	0.10	0.17	6
Lucas, Ohio	0.10	0.10	0.56	3
Allegheny, Pennsylvania	0.06	0.28	1.00	7
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	0.05	0.10	0.17	9
Bexar, Texas	0.05	0.20	0.20	3
Collin, Texas	0.03	0.11	0.13	5
Dallas, Texas	0.17	0.23	0.30	8
Denton, Texas	0.10	0.22	0.33	2
Fort Bend, Texas	0.09	0.15	0.20	2
Harris, Texas	0.09	0.33	0.38	6
Kaufman, Texas	0.33	0.33	0.33	1
Montgomery, Texas	0.10	0.55	1.00	2
Rockwall, Texas	0	0	0	0
Tarrant, Texas	4.00	4.00	4.00	1
Travis, Texas	0.23	0.47	0.90	4
Williamson, Texas	0.33	0.33	0.33	1
Norfolk City, Virginia[a]	0.29	0.17	0.31	4
King, Washington	0.06	0.25	0.33	7
Milwaukee, Wisconsin	0.01	0.09	0.17	2
Washington, Wisconsin	0	0	0	0

[a]The cities of Baltimore and Norfolk are not part of a county.

Table II.3: Public Place-to-Shelter Ratios Used to Estimate Numbers of Children in Other Settings

County and state	First quartile	Median	Third quartile	Number of respondents
Alameda, California	0.72	1.40	2.00	14
Los Angeles, California	0.20	0.67	1.50	11
Denver, Colorado	0.07	0.15	0.31	8
Duval, Florida	0.30	0.33	1.50	13
Honolulu, Hawaii	0.06	1.00	2.75	6
Cook, Illinois	0.15	0.43	0.49	9
Du Page, Illinois	0.20	0.40	0.95	6
Jefferson, Kentucky	0.10	0.10	0.10	1
Orleans Parish, Louisiana	0.21	1.70	3.44	10
Baltimore City, Maryland[a]	0.09	0.38	1.38	10
Suffolk, Massachusetts	0.16	0.27	0.33	7
Wayne, Michigan	0.18	0.42	1.17	10
Essex, New Jersey	0.32	0.45	0.91	8
Bernalillo, New Mexico	0.17	0.20	0.88	3
Bronx, New York	0.37	1.00	2.23	13
Erie, New York	0.02	0.25	0.71	6
Kings, New York	0.36	0.64	3.23	9
New York, New York	0.52	0.64	1.50	11
Queens, New York	0.58	0.64	3.25	7
Richmond, New York	0.52	0.65	3.25	7
Cuyahoga, Ohio	0.29	0.33	0.79	9
Lucas, Ohio	0.25	0.33	0.84	5
Allegheny, Pennsylvania	0.18	0.36	0.83	9
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	0.12	0.20	0.27	10
Bexar, Texas	0.31	0.80	1.30	5
Collin, Texas	0.13	0.22	0.69	5
Dallas, Texas	0.33	0.83	1.80	11
Denton, Texas	0.55	1.67	10.00	5
Fort Bend, Texas	0.55	2.20	4.00	3
Harris, Texas	0.22	0.50	1.33	10
Kaufman, Texas	0.50	0.50	0.50	1
Montgomery, Texas	0.20	4.00	20.00	3
Rockwall, Texas	0	0	0	0
Tarrant, Texas	0.63	1.00	5.50	5
Travis, Texas	0.85	1.33	11.52	4
Williamson, Texas	1.67	1.67	1.67	1
Norfolk City, Virginia[a]	0.25	1.47	5.00	11
King, Washington	0.33	0.43	1.00	11
Milwaukee, Wisconsin	0.01	0.27	0.69	6
Washington, Wisconsin	0.33	1.00	3.00	3

[a]The cities of Baltimore and Norfolk are not part of a county.

Table II.4: Other Places-to-Shelter Ratios Used to Estimate Numbers of Children in Other Settings

County and state	First quartile	Median	Third quartile	Number of respondents
Alameda, California	0.07	0.21	0.56	4
Los Angeles, California	0.17	0.17	0.17	1
Denver, Colorado	0.33	0.33	0.33	1
Duval, Florida	2.00	2.00	2.00	1
Honolulu, Hawaii	0	0	0	0
Cook, Illinois	0.33	0.33	0.33	1
Du Page, Illinois	0.09	1.50	14.00	3
Jefferson, Kentucky	1.00	1.00	1.00	1
Orleans Parish, Louisiana	0.06	0.48	0.90	2
Baltimore City, Maryland[a]	0.07	0.07	0.07	1
Suffolk, Massachusetts	0.05	0.05	0.05	1
Wayne, Michigan	0.28	4.39	8.50	2
Essex, New Jersey	0.12	0.12	0.12	1
Bernalillo, New Mexico	0	0	0	0
Bronx, New York	0	0	0	0
Erie, New York	0	0	0	0
Kings, New York	0.25	0.25	0.25	1
New York, New York	0	0	0	0
Queens, New York	0	0	0	0
Richmond, New York	0	0	0	0
Cuyahoga, Ohio	0.16	0.16	0.16	1
Lucas, Ohio	0.90	0.90	0.90	1
Allegheny, Pennsylvania	0.44	0.44	0.44	1
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	0.04	0.04	0.04	1
Bexar, Texas	0	0	0	0
Collin, Texas	0	0	0	0
Dallas, Texas	0.33	0.33	0.33	1
Denton, Texas	0	0	0	0
Fort Bend, Texas	0	0	0	0
Harris, Texas	0.62	1.08	1.53	2
Kaufman, Texas	0	0	0	0
Montgomery, Texas	0	0	0	0
Rockwall, Texas	0	0	0	0
Tarrant, Texas	8.10	8.10	8.10	1
Travis, Texas	0.80	0.80	0.80	1
Williamson, Texas	0	0	0	0

(continued)

County and state	First quartile	Median	Third quartile	Number of respondents
Norfolk City, Virginia[a]	1.00	5.52	10.04	2
King, Washington	0.35	3.00	4.75	3
Milwaukee, Wisconsin	0	0	0	0
Washington, Wisconsin	0	0	0	0

[a]The cities of Baltimore and Norfolk are not part of a county.

Table II.5: Doubled-Up-to-Shelter Ratios Used to Estimate Numbers of Children in Other Settings

County and state	First quartile	Median	Third quartile	Number of respondents
Alameda, California	0.23	0.45	2.35	14
Los Angeles, California	0.17	0.50	1.60	11
Denver, Colorado	0.65	1.12	4.49	6
Duval, Florida	0.98	1.11	3.60	6
Honolulu, Hawaii	0.62	1.11	1.88	4
Cook, Illinois	0.42	0.50	3.00	11
Du Page, Illinois	0.32	2.25	2.94	8
Jefferson, Kentucky	0.60	1.47	2.33	2
Orleans Parish, Louisiana	0.34	4.38	7.75	12
Baltimore City, Maryland[a]	0.20	0.56	1.07	10
Suffolk, Massachusetts	0.32	0.70	43.47	6
Wayne, Michigan	0.80	1.00	2.00	7
Essex, New Jersey	0.62	2.60	6.25	9
Bernalillo, New Mexico	0.17	0.28	0.40	2
Bronx, New York	2.50	19.99	51.79	15
Erie, New York	0.45	0.60	4.00	5
Kings, New York	3.93	29.03	52.47	11
New York, New York	5.50	40.41	52.09	12
Queens, New York	24.27	51.79	65.99	10
Richmond, New York	13.00	50.94	58.70	9
Cuyahoga, Ohio	0.75	1.43	3.00	10
Lucas, Ohio	0.66	1.11	10.69	6
Allegheny, Pennsylvania	0.82	1.23	2.00	10
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	0.14	0.32	0.57	12
Bexar, Texas	1.52	3.00	12.50	5
Collin, Texas	0.40	0.75	1.70	5
Dallas, Texas	1.00	3.75	17.00	11
Denton, Texas	0.86	4.00	8.00	5
Fort Bend, Texas	0.09	2.80	4.80	3
Harris, Texas	0.30	0.83	2.67	11
Kaufman, Texas	0.83	0.83	0.83	1

County and state	First quartile	Median	Third quartile	Number of respondents
Montgomery, Texas	0.60	4.00	80.00	3
Rockwall, Texas	0	0	0	0
Tarrant, Texas	0.77	4.00	10.84	5
Travis, Texas	0.50	2.00	5.25	4
Williamson, Texas	0.33	0.33	0.33	1
Norfolk City, Virginia[a]	3.00	5.00	10.00	11
King, Washington	0.37	0.60	3.33	11
Milwaukee, Wisconsin	0.20	1.83	2.99	6
Washington, Wisconsin	1.00	6.50	36.75	4

[a]The cities of Baltimore and Norfolk are not part of a county

The range of estimates within such settings is large, even within counties, reflecting a lack of countywide information on the number of families not in shelters, hotels, or motels.[13] For our best estimate in each setting, we used the median ratio derived from the responses of those interviewed in each county who indicated the presence of some homeless families.[14] The average number of children in each family counted in

[13]We used several additional sources of information to gauge the reasonableness of the estimates provided. We asked persons we interviewed to provide separate estimates of the percentage of homeless families in shelters and hotels and motels so that a shelter-to-hotel or motel ratio could be used, along with our estimate of the hotel and motel population. This hotel and motel population estimate, based on the interviews, differed by less than 1 percent from our estimate of the number of families in hotels and motels based on use data collected from voucher providers and local governments.

We compared estimated numbers of families doubling up based on the shelter-to-doubled-up ratios to absolute estimates of the size of the doubled-up population in 15 counties where the persons we interviewed were able to provide absolute estimates. In this comparison, the median doubled-up estimates underestimate the absolute estimates by 26 percent. Weighting statistically gives a possible underestimate of as much as 37 percent.

We also compared the median doubled-up estimates to estimates of the number of families on public housing and section 8 waiting lists who were currently doubled up with others. These estimates were provided to us by housing officials in 11 counties—Los Angeles (7,478 families doubled-up); Suffolk (Boston, 7,394 families); Norfolk (Norfolk City, 780 families); Cook and DuPage (Chicago, 31,925 families); Allegheny (Pittsburgh, 1,651 families); Bronx, Queens, Kings, New York, and Richmond (New York City, 34,000 families). The median doubled-up estimates for these counties are 2 percent lower than the estimated number of doubled-up families on public housing waiting lists alone. Among the five New York City counties, our estimate exceeds the estimated number on the waiting lists. (An estimate was available of only the number of families on the waiting list that were doubled up in public housing in New York City. No estimate was provided of the number on the waiting list doubled up in private housing.) These figures should be interpreted in light of the possible duplication of families between the public housing and section 8 waiting lists and duplication among separate waiting lists maintained for several communities within these counties.

As a result of the high degree of variation among estimates from different sources, we have rated very low the certainty of our estimates based on the ratios.

[14]The median ratio is the estimate for which 50 percent of the estimates were larger and 50 percent were smaller. The minimum and maximum estimates were based on the interquartile range—responses at the 25th and 75th percentiles of all estimates collected for a county.

the shelter and hotel and motel survey was used to convert the estimated number of families in each setting to an estimate of the number of children.

Results

Churches

Applying the median church-to-shelter ratios, our best estimate is that 4,094 youths and children were housed within churches or had other similar arrangements on any given night. The low end of our estimated range is 2,340 and the high end of the range is 6,570 homeless children and youths.

Public Places

Public place-to-shelter ratios yield a best estimate of 9,016 homeless children and youths who were to be found in cars, abandoned buildings, bus terminals, and so forth. For this setting, the low end of our projected range was 4,512 and the high end of the range was 24,072.

Other Places

We estimate that between 5,148 and 10,446 children were in settings other than public places or housed through churches. These include spousal abuse shelters, detoxification centers, and jails. Our best estimate is that 7,651 children and youths were located in these other settings, not otherwise accounted for by churches, or living in public places.

Literally Homeless

Combining the results from all settings (urban shelters, hotels, motels, nonurban settings, churches, public places, and other settings), we estimate that 68,067 children and youths are literally homeless at any one time. Taking into account the uncertainties associated with estimating these populations, we believe that there may be as few as 41,176 and as many as 106,543 children and youths who are literally homeless at any point in time.

Doubled Up

County experts and shelter providers also provided percentages or ratios of the number of children in families who were doubled up with friends or relatives. Based on the median ratios (across counties), our best estimate is that 185,512 children and youths are living under such

arrangements. There is very little information on the number of doubled-up families, and the range of percentages and ratios we observed reflect this gap. In particular, our low estimate suggests that there may be as few as 39,362 children and youths in doubled-up arrangements. Our high-range estimate gives us a number as large as 296,452.

The Characteristics of Children and Youths in Urban Shelters

Discussions with congressional staff following the enactment of the McKinney Act revealed an interest in obtaining a brief profile of children in shelters and their educational experiences. In order to get a rough idea of the characteristics of the homeless children and youths, we asked shelter operators to provide information on the ages of those they housed, their school attendance, and the size of their families.

Children's Ages

The children counted in the survey were grouped into three age categories. Among the children whose ages were reported, 3,912 (52 percent) were 5 or younger, 2,717 (36 percent) were 6 through 12, and 914 (12 percent) were 13 through 16.[1]

About half the sample (48 percent, or an estimated 3,875) were school-age children (ages 6 through 16). The relatively small percentage of older children may be influenced, in part, by the policies of some shelters. Among the shelter operators surveyed, 32 percent had age restrictions on the boys and 12 percent had age restrictions on the girls they would accept. Among the shelters that had age restrictions, the average upper limit for both boys and girls was 11 years.

School Attendance

We asked shelter operators to indicate the number of school-age children who regularly attended school while staying at their shelters. Of the 3,237 school-age children for whom data were available, 85 percent were reported to attend school regularly and an additional 5 percent were planning to attend but had not yet been enrolled.[2] Applying these percentages to our estimated number of school-age children in urban shelters reveals that there were 656 school-age children nationally who were neither attending nor planning to attend school.

The high percentage of sheltered homeless school-age children reported to be in school is consistent with two previously published reports of school attendance among homeless children but much lower than a fourth report. In 1984, the Citizen's Committee for Children of New York found that 95 percent of the parents of school-age children

[1] Ages were not known for about 7 percent of the children counted.

[2] Representing 93.5 percent of the estimated number of school-age children in the shelter sample. We were unable to obtain estimates of school attendance for children and youths in nonshelter settings. Because parents may be unwilling to report that their children are not attending school, the percentage of homeless children and youths attending school might be overstated.

reported that their children were attending school.[3] In a second study, all school-age children among a sample found in Massachusetts shelters were reported by their parents to be attending school (but shelter directors reported that attendance was irregular).[4] However, in a study of homeless children and families, the Child Welfare League of America and Travelers Aid International reported that 43 percent of the school-age homeless children seen by Travelers Aid agencies were not currently attending. The difference in these estimates may reflect differences in the populations studied; we conducted our study among homeless children in shelters for the homeless, and attendance among children in other settings may differ.[5] Attendance may be lower among children of families who are without shelter, such as those seen by Travelers Aid.

Family Size

Overall, there was an average of 2 children among families counted in the survey. The average number of children among families in shelters was slightly less than 2 and the average number among families with vouchers in hotels and motels was 2.3.[6]

[3]Reported in R. Gewirtzman and I. Fodor, "The Homeless Child at School: From Welfare Hotel to Classroom," Child Welfare, 66 (1987), 237-45.

[4]See E. Bassuk, L. Rubin, and A. Lauriat, "Characteristics of Sheltered Homeless Families," American Journal of Public Health, 76 (1986), 1097-101.

[5]For example, an official with the Boston public schools said that Boston shelters can maintain a relationship with local schools but that children who are placed in hotels and motels outside the city must provide their own transportation to school bus stops in the city.

[6]The average size of families in shelters includes children of these families who were reported to be spending the night elsewhere. The average family size reported here is slightly less than that reported in the study of homeless mothers in Massachusetts shelters. Bassuk, Rubin, and Lauriat reported that mothers had an average of 2.4 children but an average of 2 children with them in the shelters.

Appendix IV

Homeless Children and Youths Not Included in Our Estimates

Our estimates do not include some children and youths who are homeless but for whom data were not adequate for even a "low confidence" national projection. These include unaccompanied homeless youths and children and youths whose families spend their own money to stay in hotels or motels.

Unaccompanied Homeless Youths

Some youths separate from their homeless families in order to ease the burden on them or to escape the family's transient existence or because they are over the age of eligibility for family shelters. There also are youths whose families offer physically excellent homes but who run away or are "pushed out" from economically or psychologically difficult situations to which they cannot or do not return. Youths in all these groups, whom we refer to as unaccompanied youths, can seek shelter in centers established to serve runaway youths.[1] We have tried to obtain estimates of the size of the population served by these shelters, the number not seen in shelters, and the percentage of these who are homeless.[2]

In 1987, 56,000 unaccompanied youths, 82 percent of whom were age 16 or younger, were served in shelters funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Administration for Children, Youth, and Families. These shelters made up an estimated 80 percent of all the runaway shelters in the United States. Assuming that the nonfunded shelters are comparable in size, 70,000 unaccompanied youths may have been served by runaway shelters.

HHS currently estimates that about 10 percent of those seen in shelters are homeless youths.[3] One expert on runaway youths considers HHS's definition of homelessness to be too restrictive and 33 percent to be a more reasonable figure. With 10 percent and 33 percent as lower and upper boundaries, an estimated 7,000 to 23,000 homeless youths were served by runaway shelters in fiscal year 1987.

[1]Shelters serving primarily runaway youths were not included in our shelter provider survey.

[2]An accepted definition experts hold regarding homelessness among runaway children and youths does not appear to exist. One expert defines a homeless runaway child or youth as one who cannot be reconciled with his or her family.

[3]This figure is based on responses to a form that intake workers complete to designate youths as either "homeless" or "runaway." The Administration for Children, Youth, and Families stated that the manner in which these data are collected can lead to an underestimate of the percentage of youths who should be considered homeless.

The majority of the unaccompanied youths may not be seen in shelters. Two experts provided us with their estimates of the number of youths not seen in the shelters for every youth served by the shelters. Of the two, the lowest estimate was 5.7 youths, and the other was 10 youths not seen for every 1 in shelters. Given a midpoint of 8 youths not seen for every 1 in shelters, there may be an estimated additional 64,000 to 208,000 homeless youths annually (based on duplicated counts). (The American Youth Work Center and the National Network of Runaway and Youth Services, however, have estimated that there are 500,000 homeless youths each year.[4]) Based on the age distribution of youths served by shelters funded by the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families, an estimated 52,000 to 170,000 homeless youths are age 16 and younger.[5]

Families Who Use Their Own Money to Stay in Hotels or Motels

The estimates reported in appendix II include families in hotels or motels when they were placed there by private nonprofit or government agencies. The estimates do not include families that use their own money to stay in hotels or motels. While some families choose to stay in hotels or motels, others simply cannot afford the first and last month's rent and other "turn on" costs needed to get into rental housing.

In a Rand Corporation survey of recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) currently housed in Los Angeles County, 15.6 percent had used hotels or motels at some time in the recent past (twice the number that reported using shelters). According to the researcher who conducted this survey, most used their own money rather than vouchers to pay for a hotel or motel room. Applying this same percentage to all the county's 200,000 AFDC recipients produces an estimate of 31,000 AFDC recipients (62,000 children, assuming 2 children in each family) in Los Angeles County who have recently used hotels or motels for housing.[6]

[4]We are working on another project to provide a more precise estimate of the number of unaccompanied youths in federally funded shelters.

[5]Among youths served in these shelters, 81.6 percent were 16 and younger. We applied this percentage to estimate the number of unaccompanied homeless youths, sheltered and unsheltered, who are 16 and younger. This will result in an overestimate of the true size of this age group if homeless youths not seen in shelters tend to be older than sheltered homeless youths.

[6]Families counted in our survey of shelter providers had an average of 2 children. We do not know the average number of children in AFDC families that have used hotels or motels in Los Angeles County.

Annual Prevalence: The Number of Families Served Annually

To assess the extent to which a 1-night count of children in shelters would adequately portray the problem of homelessness among families, shelter providers were asked to estimate the number of different families for whom they had provided shelter over the course of the previous year. From the data collected, we were unable to produce an unduplicated estimate of the number of families and children served.[1] In all the annual figures presented in this section, some families and children may have been counted more than once.

Among the survey respondents, a total of 46,368 families were sheltered annually by shelter operators, and 12,925 families were placed in hotels or motels with vouchers. Projecting this nationally to the 83 urban counties, an estimated 127,056 families spent at least 1 night in a shelter last year, and 27,889 were provided vouchers.[2] Using the average family size found in our survey, these project, cumulatively, to 309,890 children and youths who were homeless and served by shelters or voucher providers in a given year.

These annual prevalence figures do not include children who are placed in hotels and motels by government agencies, which represented 42 percent of the lower-bound estimate. We are also unable to estimate the annual prevalence of homelessness in other settings and the proportions of families placed in hotels or motels by local governments and in the other settings that are eventually seen by shelter providers in the course of a year.

[1] Although respondents were asked to provide the number of different families served, in some unknown percentage of cases, unduplicated counts were not available. These figures include duplication resulting from both the same shelter provider serving the same family several times in 1 year and different shelter providers serving the same family. As a result, the figures overstate the annual prevalence of homelessness among families seen by shelter providers.

[2] Beyond giving families shelter through vouchers, hotels and motels nationwide donated shelter to 3,443 individuals, including 1,677 children, through a national partnership established to provide services to the homeless during the 9-month period of January through September 1988. These figures can be annualized to make an estimate of 2,236 for the full year 1988. It is not known to what extent these figures overlap with numbers provided by social service agencies that may rely on the partnership program.

Methods of Comparison With Other Estimates

National Estimates

Two recently published reports have served as the basis for other national estimates of the number of homeless children. One estimate was contained in a National Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine report and the other was derived from the results of a study conducted by the Urban Institute. In this appendix, we compare the results of these studies to our estimates. We have tried to give estimates equivalent to those in the studies in terms of subpopulations.

The Urban Institute Report

Working under contract to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Urban Institute conducted a study of homeless persons in shelters and soup kitchens in a sample of 20 cities with populations greater than 100,000.[1] In these 20 cities, the analysts interviewed not only homeless persons and service providers in a sample of soup kitchens and shelters but also a sample of nonusers of these services. A national estimate of the homeless population size was derived by adjusting rates of homelessness found in the cities and applying them to the population in suburban and rural areas.[2]

The Urban Institute estimates that, at any one time, there are approximately 61,500 children in cities and suburban areas and an unknown percentage of children among an estimated 52,000 homeless in rural areas.[3] The Institute's estimate of the number in urban and suburban areas is comparable to our estimate of 60,710, excluding rural settings.

The Institute of Medicine Report

In Homelessness, Health, and Human Needs, the Institute of Medicine acknowledged that, at the time of its report, studies seeking to provide an estimate of the number of homeless children nationwide were nonexistent.[4] However, it portrays the magnitude of the problem in what it describes as a conservative estimate of 100,000 children. This estimate

[1] Feeding the Homeless: Does the Prepared Meals Provision Help? vols. 1 and 2 (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 1988).

[2] The term "suburban" is ours—it includes the population living within metropolitan statistical sampling areas but outside the limits of cities containing populations greater than 100,000. The Urban Institute's definition of rural areas is the same as ours. The national estimate, not contained in the original report, was published in a memorandum available from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

[3] This estimate is based on information contained in Feeding the Homeless; additional information contained in a memorandum from the Urban Institute to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and information obtained in a telephone conversation with a researcher at the Urban Institute.

[4] Homelessness, Health, and Human Needs (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Medicine, 1988).

appears to include all groups included in our estimate except the doubled-up population.

The estimate contained in the Institute of Medicine report was developed from three sources: an estimated 736,000 homeless persons on any given night (from a report published by the National Alliance to End Homelessness), an estimate that 25 percent of the homeless population are family members (from a U.S. Conference of Mayors report), and an estimate that 55 percent of homeless family members are children (from a New York Times article on homeless persons).[5] Multiplying these estimates together results in an estimate of roughly 100,000 children, or about 14 percent of the homeless population.

The figure of 736,000 contained in the National Alliance to End Homelessness report (hereafter referred to as the Alliance report), which serves as the basis for the 100,000 estimate is an "upper bound estimate of the maximum number of homeless people," resulting from applying a 20-percent per year growth rate to a reanalysis of 1984 data from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Since the foundation of the 736,000 figure can be traced back to estimates of the total homeless population that HUD collected in interviews with local observers, we must assume that the subpopulations included in the 736,000 estimate are the same as those included in HUD's estimates of homeless in emergency shelters and public places. Doubled-up homeless persons do not appear to have been included in the estimates.

The Institute of Medicine estimate of 100,000 homeless children is larger than the estimate of 68,067 literally homeless children and youths. There are two plausible reasons for this discrepancy.

1. A 20-percent annual rate of growth in the homeless population was used in the Alliance report to adjust figures HUD published in 1984, producing an estimate of the nightly homeless population in 1988. The resulting estimate of 736,000, which was described in the Alliance report as an "an upper bound estimate of the maximum number of homeless people" and which served as the foundation for the Institute of Medicine projections, is based on the annual growth in the demand for

[5]The Institute of Medicine report cites an article by ICF, Inc., as the source for the figure of 736,000. We could not find the article among the references listed in the report. When we contacted the Institute of Medicine, we were told that the figure was drawn from a report by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, which estimates the number of homeless persons to be 736,000.

shelter, which may not be an accurate reflection of the true growth of the homeless population in shelters and on the streets.[6]

2. The Institute of Medicine's estimate of the percentage of children in the homeless population (about 14 percent) is based on an estimate of the percentage of family members (25 percent, based on a survey of city officials in 25 cities) and the percentage of family members who are children (55 percent, from a New York Times article). These figures may reflect the percentage of children among the homeless seen by service providers (the most readily available source of information generally used to produce such estimates), whereas children may constitute a smaller fraction of the combined shelter and street subgroups included in the total estimate of 736,000.

The Institute of Medicine's estimate of the percentage of homeless children is similar to the Urban Institute's estimate of the percentage of child service users (15 percent). The subgroups of homeless persons apparently included in the Institute of Medicine estimate, those in shelters and on the street, may be more comparable to the Urban Institute's target population of both service users and nonusers, among which we have estimated that children make up only about 12 percent.[7] Using this as an estimate of the proportion of homeless persons in shelters and on the streets, about 87,731 of the 736,000 estimated homeless persons are children. Our comparable figure is 68,067, or 23 percent lower than the adjusted Institute of Medicine figure.

What States Filed in Their Interim Reports

Under the McKinney Act, a coordinator for the education of homeless children and youths in each state is to file both an interim report (originally by December 31, 1987, but later extended to June 30, 1988) and a final report (on December 31, 1988) on the number of homeless children

[6]The rate of growth in the demand for shelter may reflect the rate of growth in the number of people who become homeless, but it is not necessarily an accurate measure of the rate of growth in the shelter and street populations. Increases in the number of people in shelters is influenced by increases in the number of shelter beds available. When the increases in shelter beds do not keep pace with the number of families becoming homeless, growth can be seen in the number of families in other settings, such as doubling up, that is not included in the estimates.

[7]The percentage of homeless children changes when doubled-up homeless persons are included. If families are more heavily represented among the doubled up population, the percentage of all homeless children (including those doubled up) increases.

and youths.[5] We conducted surveys with the coordinators, or designated representatives, in 43 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. The surveys were conducted during July and August 1988 to find out what the states had reported in their interim reports to the U.S. Department of Education.

The results of these surveys are contained in table VI.1. Of the 45 jurisdictions we contacted, 24 provided statewide estimates of the number of homeless children and youths totaling 95,380. There is a lack of consistency among the states in the definition of homelessness and the methods used to produce estimates that makes comparisons of these figures and any other national estimates difficult. For example, some states furnished estimates of only the number of children in shelters, some included estimates of children doubled up, others did not specify the subgroups included, one included children in foster homes, and others included children in shelters for runaway youths (a subgroup of homeless children that has not been addressed in previous estimates of the number of homeless children, including ours). While some states were able to base their estimates on systematic surveys or recordkeeping systems, others relied on the opinions of experts.

Table VI.1: Status of 45 States' Interim Reports to the U.S. Department of Education[a]

State	Method of data collection and status	Number of children and youths	Public and private shelters	Doubled up	Other
Alabama	Sent survey to school districts and shelters but had not heard from all by 7/25/88	[b]	[b]	[b]	[b]
Alaska	Data collected from Department of Community and Regional Affairs; includes children 21 and younger	1,000	[c]	[c]	[c]
Arkansas	Research consultants hired to survey agencies, shelters, and schools and to visit parks and other public settings	677	[c]	[c]	[c]
Colorado	Surveyed shelters, agencies, and churches	1,984	[c]	[d]	[d]
Connecticut	Represents quarterly data 1/88 through 3/88; Department of Human Services counted 42 DHS-funded shelters	490	[c]	[d]	[d]
Delaware	Had not begun to collect data by 7/28/88	[b]	[b]	[b]	[b]

[5]On February 15, 1989, the Department of Education transmitted its final report to the Congress. Aggregating estimates provided by states, they estimated that there were approximately 220,000 school-age homeless children throughout the country. Over three quarters (170,000) of these children were reported to be in public or private shelters or other settings. The remainder (about 55,000) were identified as living with relatives or friends.

State	Method of data collection and status	Number of children and youths	Public and private shelters	Doubled up	Other
District of Columbia	Census of shelters by Department of Human Services and interviews with principals in all school districts; used only census results	1,236	c	d	d
Florida	Did not receive grant money until mid-June; coordinator started work on 6/28/88	b	b	b	b
Georgia	Used grant money to hire the Center for Urban Research in Atlanta to conduct a study; the center set up open forums across the state on the definition of homelessness, surveyed school superintendents, shelters, sheriff's offices, youth development centers, advocacy groups, and county social service departments	3,125	c	c	d
Idaho	No coordinator had been hired by 7/28/88 and they were not sure what their plan of action would be; might contract with local university for data collection	b	b	b	b
Illinois	No coordinator hired by 7/26/88	b	b	b	b
Indiana	No data collection begun by 7/26/88	b	b	b	b
Iowa	Contracted with private university, which interviewed departments of Human Services, General Relief, and Community Action and shelters and churches in each county; number is based on partial county reports; interim report was not filed because data collection was in progress	2,007	c	c	c
Kentucky	Survey sent to public shelters for homeless youths and private or state-operated centers for youths and families; also counted county school-age homeless	1,578	c	d	c
Louisiana	Figures based on a study conducted in Ohio, the U.S. Conference of Mayors report, and a HUD study; it was estimated that 10% to 15% of the metropolitan homeless are families, and from this they estimated the number of children	3,000	c	c	d
Maine	Only available data were from service providers in Portland, who reported unduplicated count of 300 children in 1 month; no numbers included in interim report	300	c	d	e
Maryland	Numbers are from a survey of shelters (asked for the number of homeless children served 9/87 to 6/88), a survey of schools (asked for the number of children who described themselves as homeless), and a survey of the Department of Social Services (asked for the number who were put up in hotels and motels)	1,577	c	d	c
Massachusetts	Interim report numbers were collected from the Department of Public Welfare and a survey of local education agencies; includes children DPW placed in hotels and motels	690	c	d	c
Michigan	Funds not authorized by state legislature until 7/15/88	b	b	b	b
Minnesota	Interviewed staff of shelters serving children and youths	26,617	c	c	c
Mississippi	Official in charge left the project; project status unknown	b	b	b	b

(continued)

State	Method of data collection and status	Number of children and youths	Public and private shelters	Doubled up	Other
Missouri	Survey of social service agencies in major metropolitan areas	4,100	c	c	c
Montana	Results of survey of shelters and Department of Human Services in Helena projected to statewide estimate	6,840	e	e	e
Nebraska	Coordinator began position 7/1/88; no numbers in interim report	b	b	b	b
Nevada	Still in process of contracting with a local university when the interim report was due	b	b	b	b
New Hampshire	Coordinator not hired by 8/2/88	b	b	b	b
New Jersey	Figure based on a survey of local shelters, churches, and advocates	9,100	e	e	e
New Mexico	Data collection just begun 8/16/88; state task force on the homeless and a local university were surveying service providers	b	b	b	b
New York	Numbers are from the Human Resources Administration, which keeps monthly counts of the homeless population through a survey of HRA-funded shelters	16,378	c	d	d
North Carolina	No numbers in interim report	b	b	b	b
North Dakota	Coordinator hired week of 8/8/88; no plan of action given	b	b	b	b
Ohio	Not given sufficient time to produce estimates for interim report	b	b	b	b
Oklahoma	Surveyed agencies that serve the homeless throughout the state	1,000	c	c	d
Pennsylvania	Survey of temporary shelters and domestic violence shelters combined with Welfare Department's number in "bridge" housing plus Health and Human Services' number in runaway shelters	10,327	c	d	c
Puerto Rico	Survey of schools and shelters in the 1987-88 school year; includes children in foster homes	1,683	c	d	c
Rhode Island	Funding not begun in time to submit numbers for interim report	b	b	b	b
South Carolina	Department of Social Services provided estimate based on information from the South Carolina Coalition for the homeless	650	c	c	c
South Dakota	Used information from a homeless advocate who has been tracking this population in Rapid City; survey of shelters count combined with a formula from the National Coalition for the Homeless	1,309	e	e	e
Tennessee	Surveyed all local education agencies; rural areas reported no homeless; metropolitan areas made guesses	1,355	e	e	e
Texas	Grant not awarded until mid-June, leaving no time to file an interim report	b	b	b	b
Utah	University of Utah research methodology student hired to survey state agencies, school districts, shelters, and parents; no numbers generated by 8/24/88	b	b	b	b

State	Method of data collection and status	Number of children and youths	Public and private shelters	Doubled up	Other
Vermont	Grant not awarded until 6/1/88, leaving no time to file a report	[b]	[b]	[b]	[b]
Virginia	Refused to provided numbers; surveyed school divisions, shelters, social service agencies, and colleges and universities for studies in progress	[b]	[b]	[b]	[b]
West Virginia	No figures in interim report	[b]	[b]	[b]	[b]
Wyoming	Survey of the state's 4 shelters; excludes the 25 domestic violence shelters	40	[c]	[d]	[d]

[a]Omits Arizona, California, Hawaii, Kansas, Oregon, Washington, and Wisconsin. Includes the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

[b]No data supplied.

[c]Included.

[d]Not included.

[e]Unknown.

Local Estimates of the Number of Homeless Children

In Los Angeles, Boston, and Norfolk, we conducted case studies to identify sources of data on the number of homeless children and youths that the states could draw upon in producing their estimates. In these cities, we did not find the information collection or reporting mechanisms that are needed to provide ongoing comprehensive local estimates. Social service agencies like the Massachusetts Department of Public Welfare can keep accurate, up-to-date records of the number of children sheltered, but such counts include only the children of families coming in contact with the social service system. Shelter surveys are conducted at a local level, but these too provide estimates of only the number that use the shelter system, and surveys can be conducted only periodically.

Los Angeles, California

In Los Angeles, we found no city- or countywide efforts to count the homeless population or homeless children. No records or statistics on homeless children were maintained by county and city government agencies or the local education agencies in Los Angeles County. The Los Angeles County Department of Social Services was able to provide the number of requests for homeless assistance from families eligible for AFDC.[9] Previous estimates of the number of homeless persons (such as

[9]Under a California law, families eligible for AFDC are entitled to cash homeless-assistance payments, including 3 weeks' shelter and the first and last months' rent payments needed to obtain permanent housing.

those developed for the U.S. Conference of Mayors report) have been developed through expert consensus.

The United Way of Los Angeles County has stopped counting the homeless population, but it does maintain an inventory of shelter beds.[10] The occupancy rate of these beds was reported to be 95 percent, and service providers and government officials we talked to thought that a shelter survey in Los Angeles County is likely to result more in a measure of the resources available to shelter the homeless than in a measure of the true size of the homeless population.

Boston, Massachusetts

We were referred to the Massachusetts Department of Public Welfare as a primary source of information on the numbers of homeless families in Boston. The welfare department maintains records of all families placed in shelters that receive funds from the state or placed in hotels or motels by the welfare department.[11] They believe that they are doing a good job of keeping homeless families off the street and that the families in their system account for 98 percent of the homeless families in Boston.

The service providers we talked to in Boston agreed that there are few families in public places and that the welfare department's numbers would accurately represent the number of homeless children in shelters, hotels, and motels. However, they added that the welfare department numbers would exclude a significant number of Boston's homeless families who do not come in contact with the welfare system. In addition to homeless families that are not eligible for welfare, there are a number of reasons why a family might refuse to enter the welfare system. Among these is the fear that children will be taken from the family and placed in foster care. Unfortunately, the shelter providers we talked with were not able to estimate the number of homeless families not seen in the shelters, hotels, and motels. However, of the 37 families that contacted one shelter provider in July 1988, 16 were living temporarily with friends or relatives.

[10]In the inventory, there were 1,963 beds among the 54 shelters that would accept families with children. Some of these shelters also accepted men, women, and families without children, so it is not possible to estimate the number of children in shelters from the inventory alone. Among the shelters in the inventory that were included in a pilot shelter survey in May 1988, the number of children under age 17 represented 44 percent of the beds reportedly available. Applying this percentage to the total number of beds produces an estimate of 864 in shelters in Los Angeles County. This estimate is very close to the estimated 930 children in shelters in Los Angeles County in our October shelter-provider survey.

[11]The records do not include families in shelters for battered women.

Boston's Emergency Shelter Commission has conducted a 1-night census of homeless people in Boston each year for the past several years. In February 1988, 527 children were found in service settings.[12] The census, like the welfare department's records, excludes children among families doubling up with others and some other families that do not come in contact with service systems.

The Boston public schools also estimated that in September 1988, 117 homeless children were enrolled. To identify homeless children, the student assignment unit compares addresses on school registration forms to addresses of shelters in the city (families found to be living in cars or other public places are allowed to use the address of the school administration building when registering children for school). This method does not count all homeless children because it excludes children that have not been enrolled in Boston public schools, children who are residing in shelters not on the list maintained by the public schools, and homeless children residing at other addresses, such as those of friends and relatives.

Norfolk, Virginia

In Norfolk, the most systematic data collection on homeless persons we found is performed by the Planning Council, a human service planning and development organization in the Virginia Tidewater area working in conjunction with the Southeastern Virginia Planning District Commission and the Norfolk Department of Human Services.[13] The Planning Council has been recording the number of requests for food and shelter received by service providers in the area. From these records, they are able to construct an unduplicated count of the number of homeless persons in the Tidewater area.[14] Over a 4-month period in 1988, 1,582 children were among families requesting emergency housing assistance in cities in the Tidewater area (about 49 percent of the requests came from the city of Norfolk). Because this number reflects only requests for shelter over a period of time, and does not indicate the current location of the families requesting shelter, it is not possible to compare to our 1-night estimates for Norfolk.

[12]A total of 3,493 homeless persons were found on the street and in shelters, hospitals, detoxification centers, and other service settings. Fewer than 200 of the 3,493 were on the street. No children were found on the street.

[13]The "Tidewater area" includes Norfolk, Virginia Beach, Portsmouth, Chesapeake, Suffolk, and other cities in southeastern Virginia.

[14]A small percentage (8 percent) are duplicated requests.

During our interviews in Norfolk, we asked whether our shelter survey would miss a large number of children who might be residing in other settings. Answers varied widely, illustrating the lack of consensus we frequently encountered in trying to estimate the number of homeless children. The director of the Norfolk Department of Human Services estimated that 10 percent of homeless families in Norfolk could be found living on the streets or in other public places and the remainder could be found in shelters, transitional living facilities, or hotels or motels.[15] The service providers we talked to estimated that as few as 20 percent of the homeless families in the Norfolk area were sheltered and as many as 80 percent were living on the street or in other public places. (On the basis of information collected in later shelter provider surveys and interviews with other knowledgeable persons in Norfolk, our best estimate is that families in public places represent about 25 percent of the homeless families in Norfolk residing either in shelters or on the street.[16])

[15]We did not ask to have doubled-up families included in the estimates.

[16]The percentage of families estimated to be in public places in Norfolk drops to 14 percent when doubled-up families are included. In the Norfolk case study, we did not address the issue of doubled-up families, so they have been excluded from the discussion for purposes of comparison. Doubled-up families were estimated to represent 46 percent of the total when added to families receiving shelter services and those on the street.

Experts Consulted

Dr. Ellen Bassuk
Associate Professor of Psychiatry
Harvard Medical School

Dr. Iris Fodor
Professor of School Psychology
New York University

Dr. Kay Young McChesney
Assistant Professor of Sociology
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Dr. Marjorie Robertson
Research Scientist
Medical Research Institute

Dr. Bruce Spencer
Associate Professor and Chair
Department of Statistics
Northwestern University

Dr. David Wood
The Rand Corporation

Major Contributors to This Report

Program Evaluation and Methodology Division

Lois-ellin Datta, Director of Program Evaluation in Human Services Areas (202-275-1370)
David Cordray, Assistant Director
James Onken, Project Manager
Jo-Ellen Asbury, Social Science Analyst
Benigna Carroll, Survey Analyst
Sandra Thibault, Survey Analyst
Margaret Murray, Research Analyst
Harry Conley, Statistician

Denver Regional Office

James Criegler, Evaluator

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